

# **THE RELIGION OF THE CHINESE**

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The religion of the Chinese by J. J. M. Degroot

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**J. J. M. DEGROOT**

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OF THE CHINESE**



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THE CHINESE

BY

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## NOTE

THE Hartford-Lamson Lectures on "The Religions of the World" are delivered at Hartford Theological Seminary in connection with the Lamson Fund, which was established by a group of friends in honor of the late Charles M. Lamson, D.D., sometime President of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, to assist in preparing students for the foreign missionary field. The Lectures are designed primarily to give to such students a good knowledge of the religious history, beliefs, and customs of the peoples among whom they expect to labor. As they are delivered by scholars of the first rank, who are authorities in their respective fields, it is expected that in published form they will prove to be of value to students generally.

For the use of students desiring to examine more in detail the subject of these Lectures, the following list is given of works by Dr. DeGroot, treating of the Religion of the Chinese.

Les Fêtes annuellement célébrées à Emoui (Amoy). Etude concernant la Religion populaire des Chinois. Two Volumes 4°, 832 pages. Illustrated. Published in the *Annales du Musée Guimet*, 1886.

Le Code du Mahāyāna en Chine. Son influence sur la Vie Monacale et sur le monde laïque. Published by the Royal Academy of Sciences at Amsterdam, 1893. Imp. 8°, 276 pages.

Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China. A page in the *History of Religions*. Published by the Royal Academy of Sciences at Amsterdam; 1903-1904. Two Volumes Imp. 8°, 595 pages.

The Religious System of China. Its ancient forms, evolution, history, and present aspect. Manners, custom, and social institutions connected therewith.

Part I. Disposal of the Dead. Vol I-III, 1468 pages.

Part II. On the Soul and Ancestral Worship.  
Vol. IV. The Soul in Philosophy and Folk-conception.  
Vol. V. Demonology.—Sorcery.  
Vol. VI. The War against Specters.—  
The Priesthood of Animism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Is China's religion a world-religion, and as such worth studying?

A place as a world-religion must, without hesitation, be assigned to it on account of the vast number of its adherents. It has extended the circle of its influence far beyond the boundaries of the empire proper, and has gained access, together with Chinese culture generally, into Korea, Japan, Manchuria, and Turkestan, as well as into Indo-China, though, of course, in modified forms. Hence a proper understanding of the religions of East Asia in general requires in the first place an understanding of the religion of China.

China's religion proper, that is to say, apart from Buddhism, which is of foreign introduction, is a spontaneous product, spontaneously developed in the course of time.

Its origin is lost in the night of ages. But there is no reason to doubt, that it is the first religion the Chinese race ever had. Theories advanced by some

scientists that its origin may be looked for in Chaldean or Bactrian countries must as yet be rejected as having no solid foundation. It has had its patriarchs and apostles, whose writings, or the writings about whom, hold a pre-eminent position; but it has had no founders comparable with Buddha or Mohammed. It has had a spontaneous birth on China's soil.

Since its birth, it has developed itself under the influence of the strongest conservatism. Its primeval forms were never, as far as is historically known, swept away by any other religion, or by tidal waves of religious movement and revolution. Buddhism eradicated nothing; the religion of the Crescent is only at the beginning of its work; that of the Cross has hardly passed the threshold of China. In order to understand its actual state, we have to distinguish sharply between its native, and its exotic or Buddhist element. It is the native element which will occupy us first and principally.